

Drakan: Order of the Flame

RYNN VS. LARA: FIGHT!

At first glance, *Drakan* appears to be a *Tomb Raider* clone: same busty heroine, same watch-her-wiggle, third-person camera angle. But while Lara Croft and Rynn, *Drakan*'s lead heroine, have comparable, uh, assets, the similarities between the games virtually end there. *Drakan* is unlike any other game in its genre, combining loads of intense hand-to-hand combat with flight-sim-like aerial maneuvers—aboard a dragon, no less—all set within a majestic world that's as lush-looking as it is deadly.

The game begins with your little brother's kidnapping at the hands of some bloodthirsty trolls. You set off to rescue him, but the plot quickly escalates; before you know it, you're out to save not only your little bro, but also the entire world.

Though *Drakan*'s basic plot is typical RPG fare, what sets the game apart from your usual third-person adventure is the care that clearly went into Surreal's Riot engine. More than three years in the making, it renders everything in the world of *Drakan* with exquisite detail, and gracefully handles transitions from enormous outdoor areas to cramped indoor caves. Using 32-bit color, multitexturing, and environment-mapped bump-mapped textures, *Drakan*'s varied environments come alive with crisp, snow-capped mountains, shimmering water, and fiery lava pits. Game resolution and fog depth are also user-scalable on the fly, via simple keyboard strokes.

Framerates can make or break a game, and we encountered nary a

Graphic Not Available

hiccup in *Drakan*. Even with all the eye-goodies enabled, the game easily pulled over 25fps at 1024x768 in 32-bit color on our Millennium G400. However, *Drakan* supports only hardware D3D, so folks still living in a non-3D-accelerated world are SOL.

Of course, sweet graphics will carry a game only so far—gameplay is still king. *Drakan*'s play is best described as diverse, combining elements of action-adventure games with key-finding RPG tasks. The action is virtually non-stop as you engage in air combat aboard your dragon and melee-style brawls on the ground, using a collection of sharp objects and maces. The *Descent*-style controls used for flying the dragon can take some getting used to, but overall they're very intuitive. Our only complaint was that moving the mouse often resulted in the camera rotating around the main character, rather than aiming our weapon—a pretty annoying glitch. Clipping problems were also apparent, in some scenes, we jumped into the water and fell right out of the level. Not good.

Multiplayer support is included

Drakan's burly baddies bring Rynn nothing but bad news.

for three types of gameplay: melee combat, dragon wars, and "Master of the Dragon," in which one player mounts a dragon

and takes on all the other players, who must band together to topple the person riding the dragon. Unfortunately, multiplayer is buggy out of the box, and we had a difficult time connecting to servers through Gamespy. Mplayer support is also included, but we've had nightmares about that service ever since the *Daikatana* demo was released.

Flaws aside, *Drakan* is extremely engrossing. Not only does it kick *Tomb Raider*'s ____ all over the map, it also offers a surprising amount of depth for a seemingly rehashed formula. If this is where the future of the RPG genre is headed, you can count us in for sure.

—M J.

Lara Croft